

THE
DEATH OF PARCY REED,

An Old Ballad,

TAKEN DOWN

BY JAMES TELFER,

FROM RECITATION.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY ROBERT WHITE.

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The Death of Percy Reed.

&c.



THE event on which the following ballad was founded, has been incidentally noticed both by Sir Walter Scott, in "Rokeby," and by my revered friend, Mr. Robert Roxby, in the "Lay of the Reedwater Minstrel." We have no historical evidence to prove at what period it occurred, but as the farm of Girsonsfeld belonged to those who betrayed Percy Reed, and as that place has been in possession of the successive owners of Otterburne demesne ever since the reign of Elizabeth, we may assign it a date not later than the sixteenth century. It would appear to have taken a remarkably strong hold of the public mind; for almost every circumstance connected therewith has, by tradition, been distinctly transmitted down to the present day: consequently, an outline of the same, traced in the light which can thus be obtained, may not altogether be uninteresting to those who may honour the ballad with a perusal.

Percival or Percy Reed was proprietor of Troughend, an elevated tract of land lying on the west side, and nearly in the centre of Redesdale, Northumberland. The remains of the old tower may still be seen, a little to the west of the present mansion, commanding a beautiful and most extensive view of nearly the whole valley. Here he resided, and being a keen hunter* and brave soldier, he possessed much influence, and was appointed warden or keeper of the district. His office was to suppress and order the apprehension of thieves and other breakers of the law, in the execution of which, he incurred the

* It once fell out that an arrow, which he discharged at a deer, killed a favourite dog named Keilder. This incident has been made the subject of a beautiful painting by Cooper, which again elicited from Sir Walter Scott a poem of eleven stanzas. See Scott's Poetical works, page 714. Edition, 1841.

displeasure of a family of brothers of the name of Hall, who were owners of Girsonsfield, a farm about two miles east from Troughend: he also drew upon himself the hostility of a band of mosstroopers, Crosier by name, some of whom he had been successful in bringing to justice. The former were, however, artful enough to conceal their resentment, and under the appearance of friendship, calmly awaited an opportunity to be avenged. Some time afterwards, they solicited his attendance on a hunting expedition to the head of Redesdale, and, unfortunately, he agreed to accompany them. His wife had some strange dreams anent his safety, on the night before his departure; and at breakfast, on the following morning, the loaf of bread from which he was supplied, chanced to be turned with the bottom upwards—an omen which is still accounted most unfavourable all over the north of England. Considering these presages undeserving of notice, Reed set out in company with the Halls, and after enjoying a good day's sport, the party withdrew to a solitary hut in Batinghope, a lonely glen stretching westward from the Whitelee, whose little stream forms one of the chief sources of Reedwater. The whole of this arrangement had been previously planned by the Halls and Crosiers; and when the latter came down late in the evening to execute their purpose of vengeance, they found Percy Reed, altogether a defenceless man. His companions not only deserted him, but had previously driven his sword so firmly in its scabbard, that it could not be drawn; and had, also, moistened the powder with which the very long gun he carried with him was charged, so as to render both useless when he came to rely upon them for protection. Accordingly the Crosiers instantly put him to death; and so far did they carry out their sanguinary measures even against his lifeless body, that tradition says the fragments thereof had to be collected together, and conveyed in *pillow slips* home to Troughend. Public indignation was speedily aroused against the murderers: the very name of Crosier was abhorred throughout Redesdale; and the abettors were both driven from their residence, and designated as “the fause hearted Ha's”—an appellation which yet remains in force against them.*

Superstition, afterwards, lent her powerful aid to embellish and heighten this tragical occurrence. Shortly after day-break, or in the twilight of the evening, the resemblance of Percy Reed was often

* When a late landlord of Horsley in Redesdale, whose name was Hall, a most respectable man, had taken his allowance freely, he not unfrequently disburdened his mind by thus reverting to the circumstance:—“Wey now, Aw wunna disguise me neame—me neame's Ha'—Tommy Ha' ;”—and here the tears began to flow down the cheeks of the worthy host, “but Aw trust to me meaker, A'm nit come o' *the fause hearted Ha's*, that betrayed Percy Reed.”

seen in the vicinity of Batinghope, hurrying over the heath, arrayed in his green hunting dress, his horn by his side, and his long gun over his shoulder. Again, on a stormy night, when the clouds were careering athwart the sky, permitting occasionally a glimpse of moonlight to hasten over the darkened landscape, the likeness of the murdered man was frequently beheld in the neighbourhood of his own mansion, dealing destruction around him with a large whip so furiously, that the very trees were threatened to be struck down. Even within the last century, and in the broad light of a sabbath forenoon, while the good people in the upper part of Redesdale, were proceeding to the meeting house at Birdhope-craig, they often beheld the flitting spirit of Troughend, as he was called, under the mild semblance of a dove, take its station on a large stone in the middle of the Reed at Pringlehaugh, and if any of the party made a bow or curtsy towards it, by way of compliment, it very graciously returned the salutation. These examples shew the deep impression which the tragical fate of Percy Reed left on the memory of the inhabitants of Redesdale; and exhibit how easily any natural cause or object may, amongst a pastoral people, be construed into one of the shadows of that region beyond the dark bourn which circumscribes our present existence.

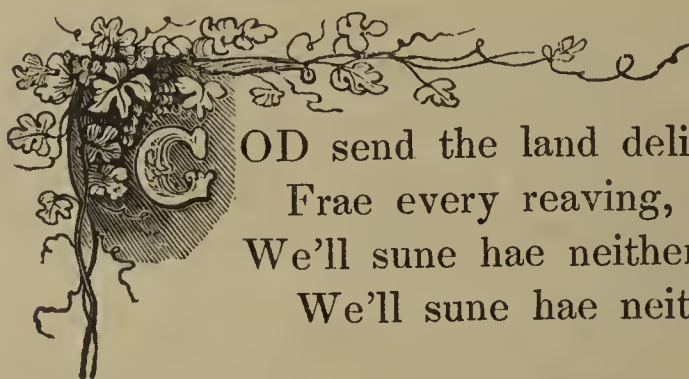
The annexed ballad was never before published, having been taken down by my valued friend, Mr. James Telfer of Saughtree, Liddesdale, from the chanting of an old woman, named Kitty Hall, who resided at Fairloans in the head of Kale water, Roxburghshire. She was a native of Northumberland, and observed she never liked to sing the verses, as she knew them to be perfectly true, and consequently could not bear to think there had been, of her own surname, such wretches as the betrayers of Percy Reed. Mr. Telfer had the honour of presenting a transcript of the piece to Sir Walter Scott, who placed it at the end of his copy of the "Lay of the Reed-water Minstrel;" and both now occupy a place in Press P, shelf 1, of the library at Abbotsford.

Touching the literary merit of the ballad, little in the way of either plot or graphic description may be found calculated to command the admiration of those who are accustomed to look critically upon such compositions. It is rude and simple in its structure, but perhaps its principal defect arises from the dialogue being so painfully protracted towards the close. The aim of the Minstrel undoubtedly was to convey a representation of what may be supposed to have taken place, when his hero fell into the hands of implacable enemies; and this he has accomplished, although neither with such spirit, nor, at the same time, with such unapproachable felicity as some of his

more tuneful brethren of that age exhibited, when sounding those strains of ballad minstrelsy, which now form so precious a portion of our country's literature.

I cannot allow the opportunity of concluding these remarks to pass, without adverting to the circumstance, and it is with peculiar pleasure I do so, of having spent a portion of my early life in Redesdale, and of enjoying on many occasions, the unaffected courtesy and kindness of its people. Indeed the district sounds still in my ears like *home*; and my heart throbs deeper on recollecting the evenings I passed there, when a number of faces, now no more, gleamed bright around our family hearth. Other attractions likewise, bind me closely to Redesdale. To throw gracefully the names of its localities into verse was a subject embraced by the early muse of Mr. Roxby, whose subsequent numbers, brief but beautiful, have at times contributed to render it no small honour. In addition to this, we have in its limits the field of Otterburne—the actual scene not only of the best contested battle ever fought in the times of chivalry; but also of one of our most ancient and spirit stirring national ballads.. Whether, therefore, in a domestic, or a literary point of view, the tract of country possesses a claim upon me, to which my feelings cordially respond; hence, its sheltered nooks, its sloping fields and solitary moorlands, with their innumerable associations, are amongst the last objects I shall forget.

THE DEATH OF PARCY REED.



OD send the land deliverance
 Frae every reaving, riding Scot:
 We'll sune hae neither cow nor ewe,
 We'll sune hae neither staig nor stot.

The outlaws come frae Liddesdale,
 They herry Redesdale far and near;
 The rich man's gelding it maun gang,
 They canna pass the puir man's mear.

Sure it were weel, had ilka thief
 Around his neck a halter strang;
 And curses heavy may they light
 On traitors vile oursel's amang.

Now Parcy Reed has Crosier ta'en,
 He has delivered him to the law;
 But Crosier says he'll do waur than that,
 He'll make the tower o' Troughend fa'.

And Crosier says he will do waur—
 He will do waur if waur can be;
 He'll make the bairns a' fatherless.
 And then, the land it may lie lee.

“To the hunting, ho!” cried Parcy Reed,
 “The morning sun is on the dew:
 The cauler breeze frae off the fells,
 Will lead the dogs to the quarry true.

“To the hunting, ho!” cried Parcy Reed,
 And to the hunting he has gane;
 And the three fause Ha's o' Girsonsfield
 Alang wi' him he has them ta'en.

They hunted high, they hunted low,
 By heathery hill and birken shaw;
 They raised a buck on Rookan Edge,
 And blew the mort at fair Ealylawe.

They hunted high, they hunted low,
 They made the echoes ring amain;
 With music sweet o' horn and hound,
 They merry made fair Redesdale glen.

They hunted high, they hunted low,
 They hunted up, they hunted down,
 Until the day was past the prime,
 And it grew late in the afternoon.

They hunted high in Batinghope,
 When as the sun was sinking low;
 Says Parcy then; “Ca' off the dogs;
 We'll bait our steeds and homeward go.”

They lighted high in Batinghope,
 Atween the brown and benty ground:
 They had but rested a little while,
 Till Parcy Reed was sleeping sound.

There's nane may lean on a rotten staff,
 But him that risks to get a fa';
 There's nane may in a traitor trust,
 And traitors black were every Ha'.

'They've stown the bridle off his steed,
 And they've put water in his lang gun;
 They've fixed his sword within the sheath,
 That out again it winna come.

"Awaken ye, waken ye, Parcy Reed
 Or by your enemies be ta'en;
 For yonder are the five Crosiers
 A-coming owre the Hingin'-stane."

"If they be five, and we be four,
 Sae that ye stand alang wi' me,
 Then every man ye will take one,
 And only leave but two to me:
 We will them meet as brave men ought,
 And make them either fight or flee."

"We mayna stand, we canna stand,
 We daurna stand alang wi' thee;
 The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
 And they wad kill baith thee and we."

"O turn thee, turn thee, Johnie Ha'—
 O turn thee, man, and fight wi' me;¹
 When ye come to Troughend again,
 My gude black naig I will gie thee;
 He cost full twenty pounds o' gowd,
 Atween my brother John and me."

"I mayna turn, I canna turn,
 I daurna turn and fight wi' thee;
 The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
 And they wad kill baith thee and me."

"O turn thee, turn thee, Willie Ha'—
 O turn thee, man, and fight wi' me;

¹ i. e. along with me.

When ye come to Troughend again,
A yoke o' owsen I'll gie thee."

"I mayna turn, I canna turn,
I daurna turn and fight wi' thee;
The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
And they wad kill baith thee and me."

"O turn thee, turn thee, Tommy Ha'—
O turn now, man, and fight wi' me;
If ever we come to Troughend again,
My daughter Jean I'll gie to thee."

"I mayna turn, I canna turn,
I daurna turn and fight wi' thee;
The Crosiers haud thee at a feud,
And they wad kill baith thee and me."

"O shame upon ye, traitors a',
I wish your hames ye may never see;
Ye've stown the bridle off my naig,
And I can neither fight nor flee.

"Ye've stown the bridle off my naig,
And ye've put water i' my lang gun;
Ye've fixed my sword within the sheath,
That out again it winna come."

He had but time to cross himsel'—
A prayer he hadna time to say,
Till round him came the Crosiers keen,
All riding graithed, and in array.

"Weel met, weel met, now Parcy Reed,
Thou art the very man we sought;
Owre lang hae we been in your debt,
Now will we pay you as we ought.

We'll pay thee at the nearest tree,
Where we shall hang thee like a hound."
Brave Parcy rais'd his fankit¹ sword
And fell'd the foremost to the ground.

¹ Confined, or sheathed.

Alake, and wae for Parcy Reed—

Alake he was an unarmed man :
Four weapons pierced him all at once,
As they assailed him there and than.

They fell upon him all at once ;
They mangled him most cruellie :
The slightest wound might caused his deid,
And they hae gi'en him thirty three.
They hackit off his hands and feet
And left him lying on the lee.

“ Now Parcy Reed, we've paid our debt,
Ye canna weel dispute the tale.”
The Crosiers said, and off they rade—
They rade the airt o' Liddesdale.

It was the hour o' gloaming gray,
When herds come in frae fauld and pen :
A herd he saw a huntsman lie,
Says he, “ can this be Laird Troughen' ? ”

“ There's some will ca' me Parcy Reed,
And some will ca' me Laird Troughen' :
Its little matter what they ca' me ;
My faes hae made me ill to ken.

“ There's some will ca' me Parcy Reed,
And speak my praise in tower and town ;
Its little matter what they do now,
My life-blood rudds* the heather brown.

“ There's some will ca' me Parcy Reed.
And a' my virtues say and sing ;
I would much rather have just now
A draught o' water frae the spring ! ”

The herd flang aff his clouted shoon,
And to the nearest fountain ran ;
He made his bonnet serve as cup,
And wan the blessing o' the dying man.

* Reddens.

“ Now honest herd, ye maun do mair—
 Ye maun do mair as I you tell;
 Ye maun bear tidings to Troughend,
 And bear likewise my last farewell.

“ A farewell to my wedded wife;
 A farewell to my brother John,
 Wha sits into the Troughend tower,
 With heart as hard* as any stone.

“ A farewell to my daughter Jean;
 A farewell to my young sons five:
 Had they been at their father's hand,
 I had this night been man alive.

“ A farewell to my followers a',
 And a my neighbours gude at need;
 Bid them think how the treacherous Ha's,
 Betrayed the life o' Percy Reed.

“ The laird o' Clennel bears my bow;
 The laird o' Brandon bears my brand;
 Whene'er they ride i' the Border side,
 They'll mind the fate o' the laird Troughend.”

* Black, in the original.

